

The Spirit of a Sound Mind

“God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”

—II Timothy 1:7

THESE WORDS WERE WRIT-

ten by the Apostle Paul during his last imprisonment in Rome, and shortly before he was executed. He knew he was to be put to death, and it is therefore a farewell message to his beloved Timothy. “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”—II Tim. 4:6-8

THE AFFLICTIONS OF CHRIST

The epistle indicates that Timothy was planning to visit Paul before he was to be executed, and there was risk attached to such an undertaking. Apparently Timothy was willing to risk his life to encourage the apostle in his time of trial. Paul encouraged, “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of

our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.”—II Tim.1:8

Paul spoke from the heart which reveals the true nature of his Christian life and experiences. That life had been one of suffering, of privation, of weariness and imprisonment. Now it was to be climaxed by violent death at the hands of pagan executioners. He had truly experienced the afflictions of Christ (Heb. 10:32), but in so doing he had also experienced the power of God to sustain him in his every time of need.

The apostle was assuring Timothy that God would also strengthen him, and that the divine spirit of power would be his ready helper no matter how severe the afflictions might be. No follower of the Master has known this better than Paul. He was informed of this at the beginning of his walk in the narrow way as recorded. “I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.”—Acts 9:16

Paul never tried to sidestep any opportunity to suffer with Christ, but sought to know what the will of God might be. Oftentimes the Lord directed him to do things and to go to places which he knew in advance would lead to suffering. An example of this was when he was journeying to Jerusalem, and the Holy Spirit testified that bonds and imprisonment awaited him there. The brethren who had less spiritual discernment than did the apostle interpreted these testimonies to be warnings from the Lord and a definite indication that he should not go to Jerusalem. However, Paul decided that the Lord was merely testing him by giving him this further opportunity to suffer for his name’s sake. “Then Paul answered, What mean

ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”—Acts 21:13

When he arrived at Jerusalem he was imprisoned, and by his own choice appealed his case to Rome, knowing that it would prolong his bondage and perhaps lead to his death. He was truly a partaker of the afflictions of Christ, not because he was unable to escape persecution, but because faithfulness to his covenant led him to the forefront of the battle against the powers of darkness. He followed the example of Jesus, who voluntarily laid down his life for the sins of the people and to the glory of God.

THE SPIRIT OF POWER

Like every follower of the Master, Paul could not have walked the narrow way of sacrifice alone. He struggled, suffered, and endured; but the spirit of power was given to him by the Heavenly Father. He could rely on the everlasting arms that were always underneath and around him, that sustained and comforted him. God had promised that it would be so, and each day of his life of faithful service this promise was verified. Long before, the prophet wrote, “They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”—Isa. 40:31

Paul had experienced the reality of God’s caring hand, and many other promises of help in time of need. He could write confidently to Timothy even when facing his death. Onesiphorus was another who had remained loyal even in the face of danger. “The

Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.”—II Tim. 1:16-18

This is a wonderful compliment to Onesiphorus. This humble brother in the Lord could not be an apostle, but he shared in Paul’s ministry at the risk of his own life to stand by the apostle and encourage him. This was doubtless one of the ways that the Lord gave Paul the spirit of power. Those who are fearful cannot be used by the Lord in this manner.

“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.” (Heb. 4:1) In this scripture, the word ‘fear’ is used to describe an alertness which we should exercise in connection with the carrying out of every detail of our covenant of sacrifice. We should be concerned that by carelessness we come short of doing the whole will of God.

THE SPIRIT OF LOVE

The Lord also gives his people the ‘spirit of love.’ Paul speaks of the spirit of love from the standpoint of its being the motive which encourages the Christian to choose a path of sacrifice and suffering. Love is shown in the Heavenly Father’s sacrifice on behalf of humanity when he gave his dearly beloved Son to die for the sins of the human creation. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—John 3:16

Paul showed the importance of love when he wrote, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor; and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." (I Cor. 13:3) The natural desire of fallen man is to protect his own interests, and to acquire that which he thinks will give him security and happiness. There must be a strong motive when someone takes a course in life which means giving, sacrificing, and suffering.

When Jesus said to the rich young ruler that he should sell all he possessed and give the proceeds to the poor, he added, "and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." (Luke 18:22) Service rendered from a wrong motive suggests a contrary spirit. "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel."—Phil. 1:15-17

THE SPIRIT OF A SOUND MIND

It is through the instructions of his Word that God gives us the spirit of a sound mind. This is in accord with the psalmist, who wrote, "Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts."—Ps. 119:98-100

Soundness of mind and judgment was always manifested by our Lord Jesus, and we too should seek to have the mind of Christ. Perhaps Paul was blessed by the words of the psalmist, and may have had the

example set for us by Jesus in mind, when he wrote to Timothy that the Lord gives his people the ‘spirit of a sound mind.’ Even in the material affairs of life the Lord’s people should be able to exercise better judgment than those who are not blessed by the guiding principles of the wonderful precepts of God’s Word.

The apostle’s thoughts on the subject may be different from that of many of the Lord’s people when they speak of exercising the spirit of a sound mind. At times, we may offer excuses for not doing that which clearly comes within our privilege to carry out the terms of our covenant of sacrifice with the Lord. Excuses for unfaithfulness is not what the apostle meant by exercising the spirit of a sound mind. He would not have encouraged Timothy to undertake the hazardous effort to visit him in prison, but would rather have written to him that taking such a risk would not be exercising the spirit of a sound mind.

Jesus exercised soundness of mind in carrying out the terms of his covenant with the Heavenly Father, and there is no other way for us to manifest that same spirit than to faithfully follow his example. When we consider the mind of Christ, we see that it functions in connection with the experiences of his everyday life. All of our Lord’s followers have a certain responsibility toward those who are dependent upon them according to the ties of flesh.

ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES

An example of this is shown in our Lord’s remark to the disciple whose father had died. From the scriptural record, we read, “Another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and

let the dead bury their dead.” (Matt. 8:21,22) Some of us might have thought Jesus’ disciple was exercising the spirit of a sound mind, but Jesus didn’t answer him in this way. From the standpoint of worldly wisdom, Jesus’ reply may seem unsound, and rather abrupt. However, it was Jesus who gave this answer and we have to accept it as a manifestation of true soundness of mind. It serves as a guide for establishing our priorities.

On another occasion, during our Lord’s earthly ministry, we have a different example of the manner in which his mind viewed the privilege of self-sacrifice. This occurred at the time Peter advised him not to go to Jerusalem. We read, “From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.” (Matt. 16:21,22) Peter evidently believed that he was using the spirit of a sound mind to help his beloved Master. “But he [Jesus] turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”—vss. 23,24

Although Peter was well-intentioned, his suggestion was misguided and his advice was simply from a human standpoint. This would surely have dictated that Jesus would be making a terrible mistake to go to Jerusalem under the circumstances. But such is human wisdom, which is based upon

self-interest and self-preservation. Soundness of mind from God's standpoint is expressed in the Master's words, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." (vs. 25) Jesus spoke from the divine principle, and the manner in which he applied it points to the deeper principle of self-sacrifice that is necessary to be his true follower.

As noted earlier, the Apostle Paul was also confronted with a similar situation, and showed his willingness to lose his life sacrificially. This was when the Holy Spirit testified that bonds and imprisonment awaited him at Jerusalem. Paul accepted this as an opportunity to sacrifice in the same manner as Jesus. He expressed himself as being willing to die at Jerusalem if this should be the Lord's will. His advisers, even as did Peter in the case of Jesus, urged the apostle not to go to Jerusalem. These were brethren who were still influenced by the human viewpoint of worldly wisdom, and their first consideration was to look after their own interests.

A LIVING SACRIFICE

Paul encouraged the Lord's people to greater faithfulness and zeal, when he wrote, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Rom. 12:1) What the apostle speaks of as being a 'reasonable service' is expressive of possessing a sound mind. Soundness of mind on the part of the consecrated Christian is thus manifest in the presenting of himself, and all that he has, in sacrifice, or the losing of

his life as was expressed by Jesus. The mind that leads to this action is the mind of Christ. In this connection, Paul also said, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."—Phil. 2:5-8, *New American Standard Bible*

The Lord assures us of his sustaining power to strengthen us in our every time of need. Through his Word he inspires us with his loving care, and gives us the spirit of a sound mind. In his letter to Timothy, he urges his disciple to not fear the results of being faithful. "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."—II Tim. 2:1-4

Thus does the apostle verify the words of Jesus that if we lose our life in sacrifice with him, we will save it, and live and reign with him. It would be a manifestation of the flesh and an unsound mind to seek to avoid persecution and suffering for Christ.

Let us strive to keep our body under and be guided by the Holy Spirit. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." —II Tim. 3:12 ■